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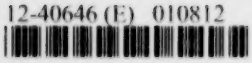

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I. UNRWA COMMISSIONER-GENERAL ADDRESSES CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING YOUTH IN SITUATIONS OF CRISIS

The following keynote address was delivered by Filippo Grandi, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, at the Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development Conference and Exhibition (DIHAD) on 1 April 2012:

My first message today…is very direct: when we speak about youth, we must involve young people in the conversation. Simply talking about them - in a world in which they communicate faster and better than their elders - does not work any more and will not help us craft programmes that are suitable for what they need.

UNRWA, being at the crossroads of humanitarian work (especially in fragile situations like Gaza, for example) and of human development activities (of which education is the most important) is well-placed to speak in a forum like DIHAD of the challenges and opportunities that are facing youth in situations of crisis. I would like to focus particularly on education as a lens through which to share thoughts that may be useful to your discussions in the next few days.

Education defines UNRWA more than anything else we do: we currently run over 700 educational institutions with over half a million students. We also have 10 technical and vocational training schools and 3 teacher training colleges. This is a huge responsibility. UNRWA educates more children and young men and women than do several Governments and it does so across borders and often amidst conflict situations. It guarantees a fundamental right of young refugees; without UNRWA and without a state of their own, they would simply not go to school. UNRWA must fulfil this heavy responsibility on a fraction of the budgets enjoyed by most education ministries. We offer basic education at an average cost per head of less than $2 per day. In the UAE, for example, this is $15. This may look cost-effective, a condition our donors are understandably demanding in order to finance us. It probably is. Remember, however, what it also means: that we are investing far too little in the quality of education of so many children - and we have seen this reflected in declining school results.

My second message today is the following: education is a basic requirement, even for populations in distress - like refugees - whose basic "humanitarian" needs are usually only identified with food, water, shelter and medicines. Education and vocational training - even in conflict or otherwise critical situations - must receive adequate investment.

This is not happening yet, certainly not in our case. With so little money to spend, we are hard-pressed to accommodate an expanding number of students which grows by about 8,000 per year in Gaza alone. To address this, what I will call the "hardware" of education - new schools, more space and better equipment - is necessary. I want to thank here our Arab donors, who have been particularly generous in funding new school construction projects. Through donors like …. UNRWA has been able in the last three years to complete or start work on many new school projects, mostly in Gaza and Lebanon.

However, the "software" of education - paying teachers' salaries, covering running

costs like transport or heating and reforming education programmes to meet 21st century quality standards - is also absolutely crucial. I want to stress this, because getting funds to build schools is comparatively easier. Raising funds for the "software" is much - and I stress much - more difficult to market, especially with donors in this region.

Modernizing education is of fundamental importance for youth. UNRWA, in step with many Governments of the region, is considering how teaching methods and curricula can best be improved, in order to ensure that our education system meets the demands of today's world. At the heart of our ongoing reform plan is the goal of developing critical thinking skills - ensuring that boys and girls in the classroom know how to ask questions, and also find the answers. This is indispensable if we want youth to make informed choices and to contribute productively to society. This lies at the heart of some of the most fundamental demands of those young refugees at our conference and generally of young people in this region: more prosperity through better access to knowledge and employment, a fairer share of resources, greater participation in decision-making. This, of course, has a cost - but I must tell you that the price we will pay if we do not bear it will be much higher.

The need to support the "education software" and especially education reforms for all, is thus my third key message today. We want to ensure that teaching material and methods challenge students and encourage them to work in different ways, including with new technologies; and we want to address the learning needs of all students, taking into account their abilities, their personal and social development and their learning styles. It is also critical to develop the professionalism of teachers by ensuring they are motivated and well-trained.

On the other hand, like other education providers, we have two major assets which are priceless: highly-motivated teachers and highly-motivated young students. Precisely because they belong to communities in exile, they all know that UNRWA schools are central to Palestinian identity as well as to individual success. The school is the beating heart of the refugee community. You would be amazed to see how much of its daily life revolves around getting the children and young people to school and seeing that they do well, hopefully well enough to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

This is thus my fourth key message - and it is a message which resonates in all refugee situations and especially so among Palestinians: education is the crucible of identity, national as well as personal. I believe this is a very important issue for DIHAD's consideration: humanitarian crises generate displacement. Displacement threatens identity. Those at most risk, in this respect, are the young. The Palestinian refugee crisis is the biggest, longest, gravest example of this - even more so now, with peace seemingly very distant, the occupation of Palestinian lands becoming bolder every day and a just and lasting solution of the Palestinian refugee question fading into oblivion. If Palestinians in their dispersal have held on for so long to their identity and their aspiration to a State of their own, it is also due to the forging of their identities in UNRWA schools.

On the other hand, conflict and exile are also - quite often - the source of deep divisions that extend over generations. These divisions are difficult to heal, especially when a political solution remains elusive, as is the case for the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict. And yet healing remains crucial to peace, especially in the case of the young. It was wise, in fact, to include in this conference a session on "youth and reconciliation". In our experience, education can be one of the instruments to (at least) help create conditions for peace. The singularity of UNRWA, operating as an education service provider in one of the most violent and volatile regions in the world and being at the same time an integral part of the United Nations - allows us to make our schools places where human rights, tolerance, conflict resolution, and United Nations values in general are taught to the young through a special curriculum established 12 years ago, which we are in the process of improving.

There are more young people in the Middle East than ever before. Ensuring that they are equipped to become innovators, entrepreneurs, leaders and productive members of their communities is one of the best contributions to peace and stability. This is the lesson that we at UNRWA have learned through decades of education and other programmes delivered to one of the most fragile and sensitive constituencies in the region: the Palestine refugees. This is why my last and perhaps most important message today is that education - and, in general, investing in young people - must be treated not only as a fundamental tool for development, but also - and as importantly - as a key strategic issue.

To return to the example I have been using, Palestinian youth are alive with positive energy, intelligence and potential. However, they demand attention because they are extremely vulnerable, wherever they are - in Lebanon as a marginalized community, in Syria in a situation of growing conflict and above all in the occupied Palestinian territory, where they are subjected to the human rights abuses which the occupation itself brings upon all Palestinians, either through settlement expansion or the blockade of Gaza, both of which violate international law. At the end of the Brussels Conference, we formulated 10 commitments to young Palestinian refugees, ranging from the improvement of education and health to creating youth lending programmes, to establishing mechanisms to better involve refugee youth in our discussions about their future and in the development of UNRWA's work. We believe that investing in them is critical not only to their welfare, but also to the stability of the region.

Like all their peers throughout the Middle East, Palestinian refugee youth must have our support today so they can face the great challenges of tomorrow - and it is our responsibility (and what a responsibility this is!) that they can be proud of doing so, their heads held high with confidence and ambition.

II. UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON QUESTION OF PALESTINE CONVENES IN GENEVA

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People convened the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine in Geneva on 3 and 4 April 2012, under the theme "The question of political prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention facilities: legal and political implications". At the opening session, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message to the meeting was delivered by Maxwell Gaylard, the Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and United Nations Coordinator for Humanitarian and Development Activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the excerpts of which are reproduced below (SG/SM/14211-GA/PAL/1227):

...

The Middle East peace process is at a dangerous impasse. The year started with an encouraging effort led by the Jordanian Government to bring Israel and the Palestinians back to direct talks, but obstacles have again prevented them from finding sufficient common ground to continue.

The target date set by the Quartet for an agreement by the end of this year remains the objective. The Quartet will continue to work toward this goal. In parallel, we must all do our part to bolster the Palestinian Authority and ensure progress on State-building and addressing the dire financial situation of the Palestinian Authority.

Numerous issues on the ground require urgent attention, including the plight of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention facilities. I have repeatedly expressed concern about this issue, including during my visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territory in February. While the total of prisoners has declined, it still numbers approximately 4,400 individuals, including around 200 minors.

More than 300 prisoners are being held under administrative detention. Some have protested their situation through hunger strikes. The application of administrative detention should only occur under clear parameters and in exceptional circumstances, for as short a period as possible and without prejudice to the rights guaranteed to prisoners. Those detained must be allowed to challenge their detention and, in the absence of formal charges, should be released without delay. The United Nations continues to follow closely the well-being of those in detention, and to raise their situation with the Israeli authorities. I call on Israel to respect its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Arrests of elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the forcible transfer of some from East Jerusalem to Ramallah are also of concern, with broader implications for the human rights of Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem. Such deportations deepen the divide between Israeli and Palestinian societies. To build trust, both sides need to take bold steps, including through the release of some Palestinian prisoners to the Palestinian Authority.

A viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel is long overdue. It is crucial that Israeli and Palestinian leaders resume direct talks aimed at reaching an agreement for the two-State solution, as called for by the Quartet. The only way to achieve this fundamental goal is through negotiations that resolve all

permanent status issues, including borders, security, water, refugees and Jerusalem.

Political momentum between Israelis and Palestinians in the months ahead is essential. Its absence only makes each day more uncertain. We must make serious and rapid progress towards peace and create positive dynamics in every aspect of Israeli-Palestinian relations, including the important issue of Palestinian prisoners.

...

III. QUARTET ISSUES STATEMENT ON ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN DIALOGUE

The following statement by the Middle East Quartet (United Nations, Russian Federation, United States and European Union) was issued on 11 April 2012:

The Quartet — United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton — met in Washington, D.C. on 11 April 2012. They were joined by Quartet Representative Tony Blair and by Foreign Minister of Jordan Nasser Judeh, who briefed the Quartet on Jordan's engagement. The Quartet underscored its support for the positive efforts by King Abdullah of Jordan and Foreign Minister Judeh.

Following its consultation in New York on 12 March 2012, the Quartet reaffirmed its commitment to all elements of its statement of 23 September 2011 and renewed its call on the parties to meet those objectives. The Quartet welcomed plans for dialogue between the parties, and discussed ways to support these efforts.

The Quartet took particular note of the 21 March 2012 Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) meeting in Brussels and underscored the need for continued international support for the Palestinian Authority's important institution-building efforts. The Quartet encouraged the Palestinian Authority to continue working toward this end. In this regard, the Quartet called on the international community to ensure the contribution of $1.1 billion in assistance to meet the Palestinian Authority's 2012 recurrent financing requirements. The Quartet welcomed the efforts by the parties to resolve outstanding issues related to tax and customs revenue collection and urged their conclusion as soon as possible.

IV. UNCTAD HOLDS EVENT IN DOHA ON ROLE OF ARAB COOPERATION IN SUSTAINING PALESTINIAN ECONOMY

The thirteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XIII) was held in Doha, Qatar, from 21 to 26 April 2012. On 19 April, a panel discussion entitled "Sustaining the Palestinian economy under occupation: The role of Arab cooperation" was held, the excerpts of which are reproduced below (TD/465).

...

The panel reviewed the research and policy analysis undertaken by the UNCTAD secretariat since the UNCTAD XII conference, with the aim of contributing to the future work of the UNCTAD programme of assistance to the Palestinian people. Panellists shed light on the issues from the perspectives of academia, government, international organizations and civil society.

A number of issues were discussed. These included the unfulfilled hopes of the Oslo Accords and the stalemate in efforts leading to the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, the Israeli blockade and closure policy in the occupied Palestinian territory, the forced erosion of the productive base, a restrained economy operating below its potential and a lack of policy space for economic recovery and sustained growth. In addition, attention was drawn to the chronic bilateral trade deficit with Israel; structural deformation and a distorted tradable goods sector; challenges facing economic policy reform under occupation; and public revenue losses, instability and uncertainty. Other points raised were the Israeli measures to separate East Jerusalem from the Palestinian economy, the confiscation of land and natural resources, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the construction of illegal Israeli settlements and the separation barrier in the West Bank.

Enhancing the Palestinian agricultural and manufacturing productive capacity was stressed as key to mitigating the impact of Israeli measures. The Palestinian Authority could attempt to strengthen productive capacity by improving regulation and directing resources, including aid, to agriculture and manufacturing, enhancing human capital and engaging youth. This, however, would require expanding policy space, which could enable the Palestinian Authority to implement such plans. The international community should advocate and lobby for enhancing Palestinian national economic interests, which were undermined by Israeli occupation.

Historically, East Jerusalem had been the hub of economic, social and cultural affairs for the Palestinian people. However, its isolation from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory was perpetuated by Israeli policies of closures, confiscation of land and expanding settlements in and around the city. Restrictions on the entry of goods and people from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory significantly undermined the development of the city's Palestinian economy. Therefore, significant financial resources were required for investing in tourism, including renovating the old city, its shops and hotels. Encouraging business start-ups by providing credit, training opportunities and linkages with the remaining occupied Palestinian territory could contribute significantly towards reviving the economy. Investment in education and health institutions, both in terms of quality and quantity, were necessary to enhance human capital and the well-being of the Palestinians of Jerusalem.

While international aid could help the Palestinian economy in the short run, it did not set the foundations for long-term sustainable development. The occupied Palestinian territory was in need of revitalizing and expanding its productive base and improving the investment climate. The Palestinian Authority should continue forming strategies, policies and legal and regulatory frameworks. However, the occupation continued to be the main impediment to sustaining the Palestinian economy. A contiguous and independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, was a prerequisite for sustained growth and development. Until this goal was reached, the international community should intensify its efforts to mitigate the dire economic situation created by occupation. This would encompass the removal of restrictions on the movement of goods and people, allowing free trade with the rest of the world and enabling the Palestinians to access and utilize their own natural resources.

The role of Arab cooperation in sustaining the Palestinian economy called for upgrading financial assistance to include massive developmental projects. These could include building a modern seaport in Gaza with shipping routes to major Arab hubs; rebuilding the national airport in Gaza; establishing a large-capacity airfreight company; building transport trunk lines to re-establish connectivity between towns and cities, production centres and border points; and re-connecting East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, trade with Arab countries should be based on policies that supported the occupied Palestinian territory by providing essential imports on favourable terms as vehicles of subsidies to Palestinian production that would offset the cost of closures and various obstructions imposed by the occupation. Additionally, setting up support programmes to mobilize and best channel foreign direct investments was necessary, including the establishment of an investment guarantee agency to compensate investors for non-commercial risks. The situation unfolding on the ground, however, rendered such a project unachievable. Israel had altered the demographic composition of the occupied Palestinian territory, taking control over land, water, and other natural resources, and thus further constraining the Palestinian productive base. Arab cooperation should include concerted action, reflecting Palestinian national economic priorities, as well as strengthened support for the economic, social and other human rights of the Palestinian people.

As for the role of Arab civil society, a strategy was needed to highlight violations of Palestinian human rights committed by the occupying power by actively participating in relevant international forums. Arab civil society should also support the efforts of the global boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against institutions that supported or dealt with the Israeli occupation system. Arab civil society should coordinate with its Palestinian counterparts to engage in advocacy campaigns addressing the donor community, the League of Arab States and Arab Governments to ensure enhanced financial support to the occupied Palestinian territory; channel investments to the productive sectors and small and medium-sized enterprises and promote Arab trade with the Palestinian economy, as this would help create jobs and generate income.

V. UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING PALESTINIAN QUESTION

On 23 April 2012, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, B. Lynn Pascoe, briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Excerpts of the briefing are reproduced below (S/PV.6757):

...

For the United Nations, achieving peace between Israelis and Palestinians is an undiminished priority. The Secretary-General was pleased to join his Quartet partners in Washington, D.C. on 11 April, in order to reflect on developments over the past six months and forge a way forward that builds on the Quartet statement of 23 September 2011. Quartet principals heard a briefing from Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh on ongoing Jordanian efforts to promote exploratory talks. After a pause, negotiators met again in Amman in early April and agreed to an exchange of letters outlining their positions. Both President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu have since continued to reiterate their desire to negotiate. Although the environment remains fragile, any opportunity to pursue dialogue towards a resumption of meaningful negotiations must be welcomed and supported.

As previously agreed between the parties, on 17 April a senior Palestinian delegation met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in Jerusalem to deliver a letter from President Abbas. Prime Minister Netanyahu has indicated his intention to respond in writing. A joint statement following the meeting noted the commitment of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to achieving peace. It is our hope that this exchange of letters can provide an opening for further dialogue.

At the same time, the Quartet recognized the urgent need for tangible signs of progress on the ground. It particularly underscored the need for continued international support for the Palestinian Authority's important institution-building efforts. It further drew attention to the need for $1.1 billion in assistance to meet the Palestinian Authority's 2012 recurrent financing requirements. The Quartet urged the speedy conclusion of efforts to resolve outstanding issues related to tax and customs revenue collection. It further singled out the need to improve development for Area C in the West Bank as central to the viability of a future Palestinian State. Palestinians require access to a fair planning and zoning regime so they do not have to resort to building unauthorized structures that lead to unjustified demolitions, which often impact the most vulnerable people. Access to Area C will also enable much-needed urban development, particularly in areas adjacent to established cities.

Reminding both parties of their obligations under the Road Map, the Quartet reiterated its call on them to avoid actions that undermine trust. Absent a political horizon, the fragility of the situation on the ground raises serious concerns. On 30 March, on the occasion of Land Day, large demonstrations were held in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as well as in Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and, to a smaller extent, Egypt and Syria. Clashes between demonstrators and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) resulted in one Palestinian being killed and some 180 wounded. The IDF used crowd-control measures aimed at minimizing the number of casualties, which

otherwise would have been higher. Palestinian security forces in the West Bank and Gaza also took measures to avoid bloodshed, and in Lebanon the Lebanese authorities took measures to prevent tension and violence in the immediate vicinity of the Blue Line. Nevertheless, we remain mindful that, in the current tenuous environment, there is always the risk of an eruption of violence.

This risk was further illustrated by the security incidents observed this month. Clashes between demonstrators and the IDF resulted in four Palestinian deaths and 293 injuries, including among 30 children. The IDF conducted 314 operations in the occupied West Bank, during which one Palestinian was killed and 248 Palestinians, including 12 children, were injured. Two IDF soldiers were also injured. Two hundred and nine Palestinians were arrested. On 18 April, the Israeli military suspended a senior military officer who had assaulted a foreign activist in the West Bank and a commando soldier who killed a Palestinian during a training session in a West Bank village. On 2 April, Israeli security forces raided a Palestinian media centre in East Jerusalem, seizing equipment and files. On two occasions, on 2 and 19 April, Israeli citizens were attacked in East Jerusalem — reportedly by a Palestinian armed with an axe, in the first instance; neither sustained life-threatening injuries.

The Quartet has taken note of the significant progress on security achieved by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Palestinian security forces have continued their efforts to maintain law and order in the West Bank. However, there have been a few incidents. On 15 April, one Palestinian militant was killed and several others were injured in a shoot-out with Palestinian security forces conducting an arrest raid near Jenin. With respect to the transparent enforcement of law and order by Palestinian Authority security forces in the West Bank, we are particularly concerned about reports of an increase in arrests or intimidation of Palestinian journalists and bloggers for expressing their views.

The Israeli Government has announced tenders for more than 1,000 housing units in the occupied Palestinian territory, 870 of which are in the East Jerusalem settlement of Har Homa, with the remainder in a settlement in the West Bank. Those actions undermine efforts to achieve a two-State solution and are contrary to international law.

As a result of a court case brought by an Israeli settler association, two Palestinian households of refugee families were evicted from their homes in the heart of the Palestinian neighbourhood of Beit Hanina in East Jerusalem. In total, 54 Palestinian structures, including 14 residences, were demolished in the West Bank, leading to the displacement of 117 Palestinians, including 63 children.

The Quartet is concerned about the ongoing settler violence in the West Bank and called on Israel to take effective measures, including bringing the perpetrators of such acts to justice. On 4 April, Israeli security forces evacuated 12 settler families who had taken up residence in a house in Hebron.

The Secretary-General follows closely the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention centres. Some 320 remain under administrative detention. On 1 April, the case of prisoner Hana Shalabi came to an end when she agreed to be deported to Gaza, after a 43-day hunger strike. However, on 17 April, demonstrations in Gaza and the West Bank took place to commemorate Palestinian Prisoners Day, and 1,200 Palestinian prisoners reportedly started an

open-ended hunger strike to protest the conditions of Palestinian prisoners.

Turning to Gaza, the Quartet, while reaffirming its previous positions, stated that the situation in and around Gaza will remain unsustainable so long as it is not reunited with the West Bank under the legitimate Palestinian Authority adhering to the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The reconciliation process has yet to see any progress since the Doha declaration of 6 February. The Quartet further underscored the importance of continued steps to address the needs of Gaza's residents, and welcomed the Israeli Government's approval at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians on priority United Nations infrastructure projects in Gaza.

This month, a total of 13 rockets, including 1 Grad rocket and 11 mortars, were fired from Gaza into Israel, while the IDF conducted 3 incursions and 3 airstrikes into Gaza. Clashes in Gaza resulted in the death of two Palestinian civilians and one militant. Thirty-nine civilians and two militants were injured. One Palestinian was killed in tunnel-related activities. Two Palestinians were killed by IDF troops on 1 and 3 April, respectively, when approaching the security fence. One was allegedly armed and trying to plant explosives, but the second was an unarmed 17-year-old boy. Indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel must cease and Israeli forces must show maximum restraint.

On 7 April, Hamas de facto authorities executed three prisoners, two of them charged with criminal cases and one accused of collaboration with Israel. The execution was carried out without the approval of President Abbas, as required by Palestinian basic law. Palestinian and international human rights organizations have strongly condemned the continued Hamas policy of execution in Gaza. The United Nations continues to call for the cessation of all military trials by Palestinian authorities.

In another development, on 5 March two Grad rockets were reportedly fired from the Sinai Peninsula towards the Israeli city of Eilat. One rocket landed near a residential area, causing minor damage.

The Secretary-General welcomed the recent meeting and joint public commitments of Israelis and Palestinians. What is important now is to transform that fragile opening into an opportunity to incrementally promote dialogue while ensuring continued international support for the Palestinian Authority's institution-building efforts.

VI. SECRETARY-GENERAL ISSUES STATEMENT ON SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY

The following statement was issued on 24 April 2012 by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

The Secretary-General is deeply troubled by the decision of the Government of Israel to formally approve three outposts in the West Bank: Sansana, Rechelim and Bruchin.

The Secretary-General reiterates that all settlement activity is illegal under international law. It runs contrary to Israel's obligations under the Road Map and repeated Quartet calls for the parties to refrain from provocations. The Secretary-General is disappointed that such a decision comes at a time of renewed efforts to restart dialogue.

VII. PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE EXPRESSES CONCERN ABOUT ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENT POLICY

The following statement was issued on 25 April 2012 by the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People:

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is deeply troubled by the recent decision by the Israeli Cabinet to "legalize" three unauthorized settlement outposts in the West Bank: "Sansana," "Rechelim" and "Bruchin". While Israel, the occupying Power, has blatantly supported and engaged in the expansion of illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, these brazen actions amount to the first official establishment of new settlements in the West Bank in 20 years, according to the Israeli watchdog organization Peace Now. In the meantime, the Israeli Government is also intensifying its efforts to thwart the evacuation of the "Ulpana" outpost ordered by the Supreme Court.

It must be clearly reiterated that all Israeli settlements remain illegal under article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, as reaffirmed in numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Wall. Israeli settlement activities also run directly counter to Road Map obligations, which Israel continues to ignore. Moreover, settlements have a devastating effect on the living conditions of the Palestinian people under occupation, while acts of violence, vandalism and harassment by settlers are escalating. The international community maintains its principled position that settlements constitute the main obstacle to a resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. By continuing to create facts on the ground and to alter the demographic status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Israeli Government is rapidly eroding the prospects for the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders.

On 11 April, the Quartet expressed concern about unilateral and provocative actions, including continued settlement activity, which cannot prejudge the outcome of negotiations. It is particularly troubling that, at the moment the Palestinian leadership has conveyed to the Israeli Government its latest initiatives towards the resumption of the peace process and the Quartet and its regional partners are redoubling their efforts in this regard, Israel, the occupying Power, has instead chosen to continue the path of intransigence and defiance of the collective will of the international community.

While Israel continues to bend the law to accommodate its settlers, it continues relentlessly pursuing its illegal campaign of house demolitions and expulsions targeting Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and particularly in Occupied East Jerusalem. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reported that during the past week alone, 67 Palestine refugees, more than half of them children, were forcibly displaced again as a result of eviction or demolitions, while settlers moved in, in yet another flagrant violation by Israel of its legal obligations as the occupying Power.

The Bureau of the Committee reiterates its call on the Israeli Government to immediately freeze all settlement activity, to

dismantle outposts as called for by the Road Map, and to refrain from any provocative acts that undermine international efforts to revive Israeli-Palestinian talks. The Bureau calls on the Quartet to monitor and ensure Israeli compliance with the Road Map. The Security Council has determined that settlements are both contrary to international law and an impediment to peace. The Bureau calls upon the Council to meet its legal obligations as the guardian of international peace and security and to find the resolve to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to halt and dismantle settlements in order to safeguard the two-State solution. The Bureau calls on the Depositary to urgently convene a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure accountability and to make Israel respect its legal obligations.